

## Former prisoners struggle with new lives, study says

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A new study confirms some things prison officials have long known: The deck is stacked against former inmates, and the communities where they return suffer along with them.

*One Year Out*, a study by the Urban Institute Justice Policy Center based on interviews with nearly 300 Ohio prisoners who returned to the Cleveland area, found they faced significant problems that often drove them back to prison. The Urban Institute is a Washington-based, nonpartisan, nonprofit education and research organization.

"One year after release, the men in the study had little stability in their lives and desperately needed community services to help them succeed," said Christy A Visher, principal researcher and the study's co-author. "Most were living in temporary housing, were not working full-time and had health problems that required medical attention."

The Cleveland study was part of a three-year project examining the experiences of inmates returning home to Ohio, Illinois, Maryland and Texas.

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction is expected to release up to 30,000 prisoners this year. After three years, 38 percent will be back behind bars, according to the study's figures.

"We can't solve this problem by ourselves," prisons chief Terry Collins said. "Regardless of what anybody does, we all deserve a second chance to do the right thing."

He said several state and community agencies plus faith-based organizations are working cooperatively to help ease re-entry problems.

Collins said he's had "long talks" with Gov. Ted Strickland, a former prison psychologist. Strickland asked Collins to come up with creative solutions to ease prison overcrowding and reduce recidivism.

In the Urban Institute study, researchers interviewed 294 of 424 initial participants one year after they were released. By then, 56 were back in jail or prison.

They found that just one in three had full-time jobs, about half were living in the same neighborhood as before they went to prison and 40 percent had been arrested at least once in the preceding year.

Many said they lived in areas where drugs are a big problem, and most reported using alcohol and drugs.

The study showed overall that community services are stretched to the breaking point by the demands of 650,000 prisoners released annually in the U.S.

Visher said that the findings "point to important policy opportunities for change -- both in prison and in the community -- that would reduce recidivism, reduce illegal drug use, and increase public safety in Cleveland's neighborhoods. Many of these policy changes are not expensive."

Among the recommendations were providing housing assistance immediately after release, coupled with employment assistance and substance-abuse treatment. The study also suggested involving families more closely in prisoners' re-entry, allowing more liberal partner visitation during incarceration and offering marriage-support services after release.

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## **Life after prison**

Key findings one year after release:

- Housing: 46 percent were living with a parent or sibling, 33 percent with a spouse or intimate partner.
- Employment: Fewer than half had a job; 37 percent were working full-time, 11 percent part-time.
- Relationships: 27 percent said family support was the most important factor keeping them out of prison.
- Health: 59 percent reported a physical illness 12 months after release; 33 percent were receiving treatment.
- Substance use: 35 percent reported drug or alcohol use; 18 percent used more than once a week.
- Parole violations and recidivism: 15 percent returned to prison, most for a new crime, the rest for parole violations; 29 percent reported committing at least one crime since release; 40 percent reported having been arrested.

Source: Urban Institute Justice Policy Center

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